



Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office

A GUIDE TO VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

**If you are in immediate danger of harming yourself or others, please
call 999 and request an ambulance.**

**If you are having intrusive thoughts and are concerned that you might
want to harm yourself, please contact –**

Lifeline NI (24hr Helpline) – 0808 808 8000

or

Samaritans (24hr Helpline) – 0330 094 5717

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FOREWORD



Danny Kinahan VETERANS' COMMISSIONER, NI

"As Northern Ireland's first Veterans Commissioner, I warmly welcome the publication of this guide. At the outset, it is important to say that the majority of those who have left the armed services don't require assistance - but there are others who do need support across a range of areas.

Mental health was one of the first issues that came my way after I was appointed to this role and highlighted to me the need there is within the military and veteran community (indeed across all society) with respect to access to mental health support.

There are many organisations in Northern Ireland that do excellent work, but it is so important not to forget to do the simple things first. Having a first point of call for veterans with someone who understands the key issues around mental health and who can listen, and signpost the person seeking help to the right people is key.

I trust that this guide will go some way to ensure that veterans' can easily access the right information and assistance when they need it."

Colonel (Ret'd) Johnny Rollins CHAIRMAN, NIMHC



"I am extremely grateful to all of those who have contributed towards the creation of this guide. Although we do our best to ensure that our veterans receive all the support they deserve as envisaged under the Armed Forces Covenant, addressing the mental health of our veterans has long been at the top of our priorities.

Despite the challenges faced, there is help out there and this guide will, I hope, make access to that help easier. My special thanks to those bodies cited in the guide who provide such care and to the Commissioner whose impetus behind this has been pivotal in its production."

INTRODUCTION

Veterans and their families have often experienced life events which impact on their mental health. This guide is designed to give you an outline of the services available to you in NI, should you ever need to use them. Services range from activities and therapies to combat issues such as low mood and mild depression, to treatments for more severe mental health conditions such as PTSD. Asking for help can seem daunting, but there are many people who will support you if you choose to take that first step.

In producing this Guide, the NIVSO in collaboration with the Office of the Veterans' Commissioner, has conducted a detailed Data Capture exercise, consulting over 80 organisations that provide varying degrees of support for those experiencing mental health issues, across Northern Ireland.

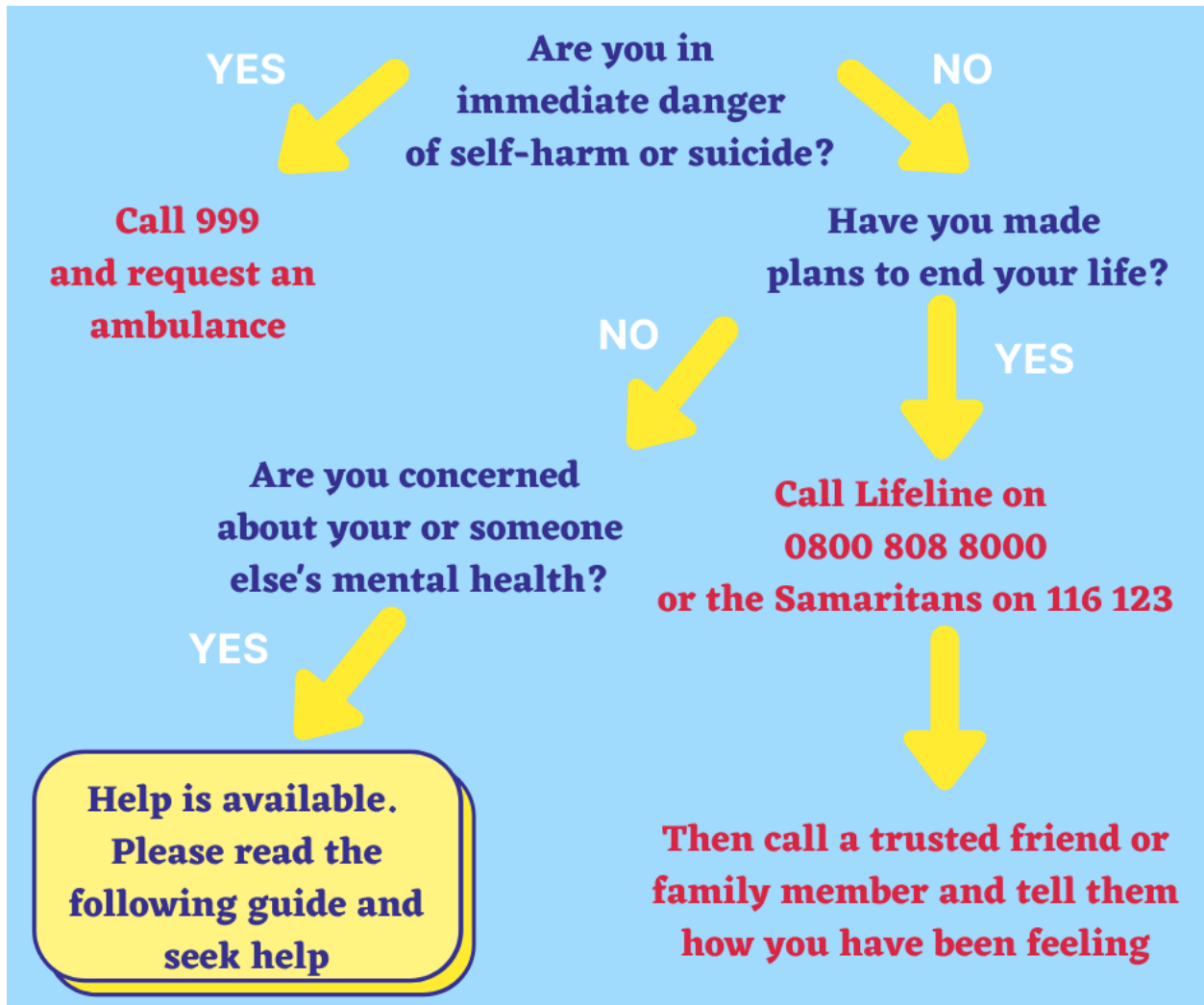
We have concluded that, with Veterans' needs in mind, there are 6 Key Referral Partners, who provide mental health services. They may be able to offer you treatment directly, or signpost you to another recognised partner organisation in your locality, that will best meet your needs.

All Veterans who contact one of the 6 Key Referral Partners will be directed on to a path for treatment.

In addition, we have produced flyers which direct you to mental health services in your local area. These flyers are available to reference or download from the NIVSO website, or through your local Veterans' Champion.

IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS PLEASE CONTACT THE EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS ON THE COVER OF THIS GUIDE, OR CONSULT THE FLOW CHART ON PAGE 5.

GUIDANCE FOR VETERANS EXPERIENCING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS



WAYS TO ACCESS SUPPORT

There are four main routes you can use to access help and support. You can access services through statutory means via your local GP or alternatively, you can access services through the large number of voluntary organisations working with Veterans in NI. You can also access services through private healthcare providers, and online providers.

1) STATUTORY SERVICES

To access help through statutory services you should in the first instance make an appointment to speak to your GP. They will advise you of the range and type of services available through the NHS. In some instances, waiting times may vary, depending on your geographic location. Some waiting times may be very long, and for some services you may find using another route may give you faster access to services.

2) VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AND VETERANS' CHARITIES

A number of voluntary organisations provide mental health support services to Veterans in NI. Services offered range from very low-level support through to psychiatric services. We have produced flyers in conjunction with this Mental Health Guide, which detail other support available in each individual Council area. For more information, please see Annex.

3) PRIVATE PRACTITIONERS

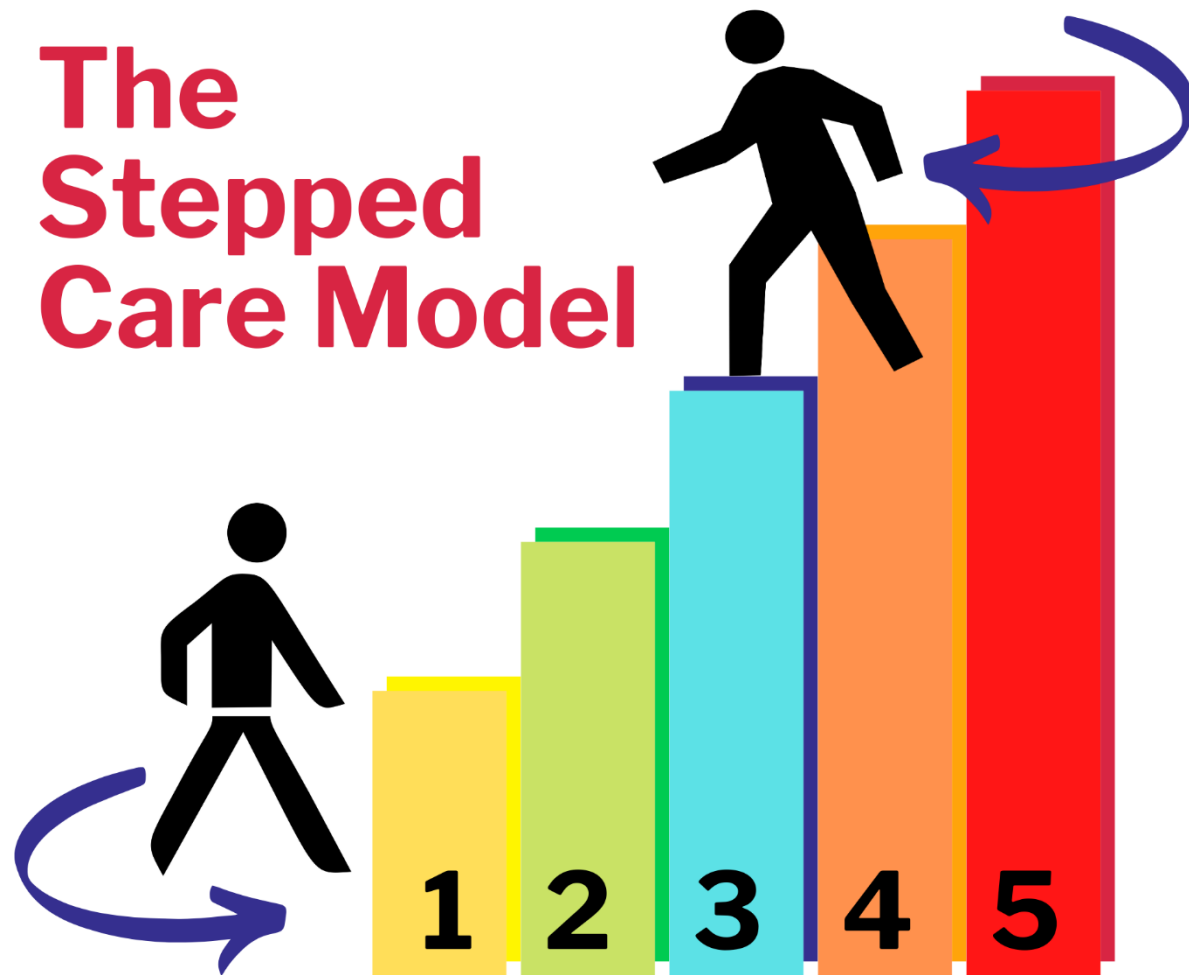
There are a number of things you should be aware of when accessing services through private practitioners.

- You should ensure that any counsellors (also sometimes referred to as psychotherapists) are properly qualified and are accredited members of either the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or The National Counselling Society. Both organisations provide lists of accredited counsellors on their websites.
- Check in advance about the possible costs of any treatments.
- Ask around for reviews and recommendations. Speaking to others who have used a service is always the most reliable way to ascertain the quality of provision.

4) ONLINE PRACTITIONERS

Online providers of counselling exist in both the private and charitable sector. This may be an option where accessibility is a factor. Most mental health support providers now provide online services in response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

THE STEPPED CARE MODEL



The Stepped Care Model is a universally recognised standard which defines different types of therapeutic intervention into 5 clear steps. The NIVSO used this model, when surveying many organisations across Northern Ireland, as to the type and level of Mental Health support they provided.

A person and his / her treatment may move between stages on this model. It is not intended as a diagnostic tool, rather as a means to understand the differences between the levels of intervention an organisation can offer.

Details of Each Stage of the Stepped Care Model

STEP 1 Self-directed health and wellbeing services.	<p>Support at this level usually involves responding to stress and mild emotional difficulties which can be resolved through making recovery focused lifestyle adjustments and adopting new problem solving and coping strategies.</p>
STEP 2 Primary Care Talking Therapies	<p>Support at this level usually involves responding to mental health and emotional difficulties such as anxiety and depression. Recovery focused support involves a combination of talking therapies and lifestyle advice.</p>
STEP 3 Specialist Community Mental Health Services	<p>Support at this level usually involves responding to mental health problems which are adversely affecting the quality of personal / daily and / or family / occupational life. Recovery focused support and treatment will involve a combination of psychological therapies and / or drug therapies.</p>
STEP 4 Highly Specialist Condition Specific Mental Health Services	<p>Support at this level usually involves providing care in response to complex / specific mental health needs. Care at this step involves the delivery of specialist programmes of recovery focused support and treatment delivered by a range of mental health specialists.</p>
STEP 5 High Intensity Mental Health Services	<p>Support at this level is usually provided in response to mental health needs, including adopting new problem solving coping strategies, which involves the delivery of intensive recovery focused support and treatment provided at home or in hospital.</p>

TYPES OF SUPPORT AND TREATMENT

We have broadly categorized some of the types of treatment that may be recommended under the various stages of the Stepped Care Model. Please note that this list is not prescriptive, and nor is each different type of treatment specific to a particular step. Frequently a combination of treatments are used which traverse one or more steps. You may not have heard of some of these types of treatment or support. This list focuses on some of the most frequently used treatments. There is no right or wrong combination of treatments. Each individual is different and what works for one person, may not work for another. Identifying a unique combination of treatments to bring about better mental health, is all part of holistic, client –centered care. The organisations in this Guide and listed on our flyers, will use a combination of these approaches.

STEP 1

Peer Support

Peer support programmes are usually led by individuals who have had similar life experiences to users. In the Veteran community, peer support programmes are led by Veterans who have themselves experienced mental health issues, so they will know how best to support you.

Veterans are often alone in having to manage complex environmental factors which influence behaviour change. According to the World Health Organisation, peer support can link people with shared experiences, to provide the practical, emotional, and ongoing support that is critical to sustained behaviour change. Strong evidence also exists that social support is a protective factor in health. Groups may meet locally in your area.

Complementary Therapies

Neuroscientists now understand that physical treatments can cause changes in the brain. A better understanding of how the brain and body interact means scientists now understand the importance of engaging people in somatic-based exercises and interventions (regulating heart rate variability, touch, yoga, meditation) as a way of managing trauma and other mental health issues.

Complementary therapies are delivered alongside other treatments and can greatly benefit your mental health. Massage, acupuncture, reflexology and yoga are examples of the types of complementary therapies available.

STEP 2

Counselling, Talking Therapies, and Psychotherapy

A counsellor or psychotherapist is someone who is employed to use their skills in order to help others understand or explore their emotional problems. Counselling and psychotherapy are umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies. They are delivered by trained practitioners who work with people over a short or long term to help them bring about effective change and/or enhance their wellbeing.

Talking therapies are psychological treatments used to address issues such as stress, anxiety and depression. There are lots of different types of talking therapies, but they all involve working with a trained therapist. You should ensure that any counsellors / psychotherapists, are accredited members of either the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or The National Counselling Society. Both organisations provide lists of accredited counsellors on their websites.

Family Therapy

Some providers offer family therapy sessions. It is common for the whole family to be affected by a Veteran's poor mental health. These types of sessions may help to support your family and to help your family better support you.

Family therapy can lead to a better understanding of healthy boundaries and family patterns and dynamics. It can also help enhance communication, improve problem solving, improve empathy, reduce conflict, and build better anger management skills.

Drug and Alcohol Addiction Services

You may have an alcohol or drug mis-use issue as a result of poor mental health. Specific services exist to help you address these issues. Any drug or alcohol related issue would be addressed alongside other treatment you may be receiving.

Treatment may be residential or non-residential. Clinical residential treatment programs may include intensive, professional mental health treatment provided daily on-premises, individual counselling/psychotherapy, group therapy, vocational/educational counselling and support, and treatment for co-occurring addictions.

Nature-Based Therapies

In recent years nature-based therapies have increasingly been used to improve mental health. Nature-based (or nature-assisted) therapies are defined as therapeutic interventions that incorporate plants, natural materials, and/or outdoor environments. The health benefits of interactions with the natural environment have been demonstrated in three categories, short-term recovery from stress and mental fatigue, faster recovery from physical illness, and improvements in long-term health and wellbeing.

Equine Therapy

Equine-assisted psychotherapy incorporates horses into the therapeutic process. People engage in activities such as grooming, feeding, and leading a horse while being supervised by a mental health professional. This therapy helps people develop skills such as emotional regulation, self-confidence, and responsibility.

Equine-assisted therapy is growing in popularity due to its 'experiential approach' and some burgeoning evidence of its effectiveness. There are a variety of terms used to describe equine-assisted psychotherapy, including - equine-assisted mental health, equine-assisted counselling, equine-facilitated psychotherapy, and equine-assisted therapy.

Online Support

You can access some support services online, such as online counselling and self-help resources. Some services may be free, however, some are private services which involve a payment. In the same way that you would check the credentials of a face-to-face counsellor, you should also check the qualifications of anyone providing counselling online.

You should ensure that any counsellors / psychotherapists, are accredited members of either the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or The National Counselling Society. Both organisations provide lists of accredited counsellors on their websites.

Combat Stress provide online resources that you can access at any time. These can be found at: <https://selfhelp.combatstress.org.uk/>

STEP 3

Clinical Psychology Support

A psychologist is someone who studies mental processes and human behaviour by observing, interpreting, and recording how people relate to one another and the environment. Clinical psychology deals with a wide range of mental and physical health problems including addiction, anxiety, depression, learning difficulties and relationship issues. Psychologists will have additional skills at their disposal which a counsellor / psychotherapist may not.

Psychologists can help people learn to cope with stressful situations, overcome addictions, and manage their chronic illnesses. They can also carry out tests and assessments that can help diagnose a condition or tell more about the way a person thinks, feels, and behaves.

EMDR

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) therapy has proven to be effective in treating trauma and PTSD. It may also be able to help treat other conditions such as anxiety, depression, and panic disorders. It can be used as a treatment to combat trauma-related intrusion or arousal symptoms.

EMDR therapy facilitates the accessing of the traumatic memory network, so that information processing is enhanced, with new associations forged between the traumatic memory and more adaptive memories or information. EMDR should only be conducted by someone trained in the process.

STEP 4

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy in mental health is a specialist area within the field of physiotherapy. There is now rigorous clinical evidence that physiotherapy improves mental health, as our brains and bodies are inextricably linked. Physical movements can create neurological changes in our brain, therefore physiotherapy is an important tool in the treatment of mental health conditions.

Structured Respite /Retreat Programmes

Structured respite or retreat programmes can include a mixture of psychological therapy treatments, complementary therapies, nature-based therapies, and exercise. Activities are usually spread over a number of days and are delivered in a setting which is appropriate for improving mental health. Respite and retreat programmes are designed around an individual's unique needs.

STEP 5

Psychiatric Support

Unlike other mental health professionals, such as psychologists and counsellors, psychiatrists must be medically qualified doctors who have chosen to specialise in psychiatry. This means that they can prescribe medication, and diagnose conditions such as PTSD, as well as recommend other forms of treatment. Psychiatrists diagnose illness, manage treatment, and provide a range of therapies for complex and serious mental illness. Psychiatrists are qualified to assess both the mental and physical aspects of psychological problems.

Most psychiatrists work as part of community mental health teams in outpatient clinics or hospital wards. People seek psychiatric help for many reasons. Combat Stress is currently the only voluntary organisation who can provide this service to Veterans in NI. Alternatively, you can access this level of support through the NHS or privately.

KEY REFFERAL PARTNERS

Our research has identified 6 Key Referral Partners, who Veterans can approach with confidence.

If you require advice, guidance and signposting to a Mental Health Support Service, the table below provides contact numbers for our identified 6 Key Referral Partners:

Referral Partner	Detail	Contact
Andy Allen Veterans Support AAVS	Veteran Specific Counselling and Services Covers all NI	028 907 47071
Brooke House	All Veterans Covers all NI	028 895 31223
Combat Stress	Veteran Specific support up to Step 5 Covers all NI	0800 138 1619
Ely Centre	Support for Op Banner Veterans Enniskillen/Markethill/ Portadown	028 663 20977 / 07969330216
Inspire Wellbeing	UDR and R IRISH (HS)Aftercare Service All other Veterans (Recovery Together) Covers all NI	028 902 45821 03308 089 294
UDR and R IRISH (HS) Aftercare Service	Statutory service for Veterans from those Regiments and their dependents ¹	028 904 20145

¹ A scheme also exists to assist other veterans recently discharged from the Army as Wounded, Injured or Sick and resident in NI.

STATUTORY PROVISION

Statutory Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland

This Guide largely focuses on the provision of Veteran specific mental health care services from within the community and voluntary sector. However, it is important to highlight that statutory mental health services are in place and accessible through a Veteran's GP.

In Northern Ireland, five regional Health and Social Care Trusts including Belfast, Northern Trust, South Eastern, Southern Trust and the Western Trust and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust (collectively referred to as Health and Social Care Northern Ireland, HSCNI) are responsible for both health and social care provision.

Whilst each Regional Trust commissions community-based care and specialist mental health services, the specific nature of service provision varies across Northern Ireland, but all involve Crisis Intervention Teams, Community Mental Health Teams, Inpatient Services and Specialist Psychological Services. Referral in all cases is through a GP or Emergency Care Services.

The Regional Trauma Network

Consultation on the formation of the RTN was launched by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) on 14 June 2019. Proposals were a commitment made as part of the Stormont House Agreement (2014) to enhance the existing provision of mental health services in NI.

The HSCB proposes to improve access to the highest quality trauma services by creating specialised local trauma teams in each of the five HSC Trusts. These teams will work closely with other statutory HSC services and the community and voluntary sector to deliver nationally and internationally recommended evidenced-based trauma treatments across NI.

The RTN involves the design, co-production and implementation of an integrated service model to respond to the needs of children, young people, and adults with trauma-related psychological difficulties.

Whilst not Veteran-specific, the RTN recognises that the prevalence of PTSD in Northern Ireland is the highest of all countries that have experienced civil conflict in their recent history. These numbers will obviously include Veterans, therefore we are highlighting the development of the RTN within this Guide.

Updates on progress with the Regional Trauma Network will be advertised on the NIVSO website.

FLOW CHART TO REFERRAL PARTNERS





Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office

Mental health support across Northern Ireland

Andy Allen Veterans Support
028 9074 7071

Brooke House
028 8953 1223

Combat Stress
0800 138 1619

UDR & R Irish (HS) Aftercare Service
028 9042 0145

The Ely Centre
028 6632 0977

Inspire Wellbeing
03308 089 294

Action Mental Health
028 9182 8494

Blesma: The Limbless Veterans
020 8590 1124

Blind Veterans UK
07716227622

Defence Gardens Scheme
028 9521 6784

Family Works NI
028 9182 0341

Help for Heroes
0300 303 9888

MindWise
028 9040 2323

Parent Line
0808 802 0400

PIPS
028 9080 5850

Royal British Legion
080 8802 8080

SSAFA
0800 2321 271

Start 360
07923129559

VSS - Victims & Survivors Service
028 9027 9100

The War Widows Association
0845 2412 189

WAVE Trauma Centre
028 9077 9922

Mental health and support online

Icarus
www.icaruscharity.org

PTSD Resolution
www.ptsdresolution.org

Samaritans
www.samaritans.org

Togetherall
www.togetherall.com

For more info



What specific support is available in your area?

<p>Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Council Area</p>	<p>WAVE Trauma Centre Armagh 028 3751 1599</p>	<p>Out of the Shadows 028 3887 9679</p>	<p>FAIR - Families Acting for Innocent Relatives 07954134220</p>	<p>Tandragee Veterans' Support Centre 07964421665</p>	<p>The Castlehill Foundation 028 3833 3840</p>
<p>Belfast City Council Area</p>	<p>Start 360 Belfast 028 9043 5810</p>	<p>WAVE Trauma Centre Belfast 028 9077 9922</p>	<p>Newry, Mourne and Down Council Area</p>	<p>MAST 028 4176 3280</p>	<p>Schomberg Society 07753222553</p>
<p>Lisburn and Castlereagh Council Area</p>	<p>Start 360 Maghaberry 028 9261 4066</p>	<p>Derry City and Strabane Council Area</p>	<p>Start 360 Londonderry 028 7137 1162</p>	<p>Veterans' Hub Londonderry 07496593146</p>	<p>WAVE Trauma Centre Londonderry 028 7126 6655</p>
<p>Mid and East Antrim Council Area</p>	<p>Start 360 Ballymena 028 2568 9306</p>	<p>Mid Ulster Council Area</p>	<p>MUVE - Mid Ulster Victims Empowerment 028 8676 3349</p>	<p>Tyrone East Phoenix Group 028 877 26152</p>	
<p>Antrim and Newtownabbey Council Area</p>	<p>Listening Ear 028 9508 5934</p>	<p>Ards and North Down Council Area</p>	<p>Decorum NI 028 9145 7565</p>	<p>Horses for People 07711881577</p>	
<p>Causeway Coast and Glens Council Area</p>	<p>Ashes to Gold 028 7044 0386</p>	<p>AFVBC Coleraine Breakfast Club/The Bee Keepers Lodge 07740580123</p>	<p>Be Safe Be Well Men's Sheds 028 777 69829</p>	<p>WAVE Trauma Centre Ballymoney 028 2766 9900</p>	
<p>Fermanagh and Omagh Council Area</p>	<p>MAPS West Tyrone 028 8224 5459</p>	<p>SEFF - South East Fermanagh Foundation 028 6772 3884</p>	<p>WAVE Trauma Centre Omagh 028 8225 2522</p>		